

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EA-07 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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FM AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 891

INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIAN

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

C O N F I D E N T I A L YAOUNDE 0474

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINR, PINT, LA

SUBJECT: CONTACT WITH LAOS OFFICIALS

1. FOLLOWING REPRESENTS MEMCON BETWEEN NACBINH CHERAKHA, THONGLEUA SOUTHAVILAY(DIRECTION OF FORESTS, MIN OF AGRICULTURE, VIENTIANE, LAOS), JACK HUXTABLE, MARGE HUXTABLE, USAID/YAOUNDE (FORMERLY USIAD LAOS).

THE TOW LAO COMMUNIST OFFICIALS ARE IN YAOUNDE ATTENDING A ONE-MONTH INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON FORESTRY INVENTORY, ORGANIZED UNDER THE JOINT AUSPICES OF FAO AND THE SWISS ASSOCIATION FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. THE COURSE, WHICH BEGAN JAN 10 AT THE UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDE, INCLUDES 30 PARTICIPANTS FROM 13 DIFFERENT (MOSTLY AFRICAN) COUNTRIES, LAOS AND VIETNAM. FEATURED ARE FRENCH AND CAMEROONIAN FORESTRY EXPERTS LECTURING ON SUCH SUBJECTS AS "DENDROMETRY IN FORESTRY INVENTORY", "SONDAGE TECHNIQUES OF FORESTRY" AS WELL AS "INTRODUCTION TO AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND CARTOGRAPHY IN FORESTRY INVENTORY".

2. AFTER MEETING INFORMALLY - ON THE UNIVERISTY CAMPUS - AND HAVING EXCHANGED A FEW BRIEF COMMENTS REGARDING MUTUAL BACKGROUNDS
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IN LAOS, THE TWO YOUTHFUL (ESTIMATED AGE 30 - 35) OFFICIALS GRACIOUSLY AND UNHESITATINGLY ACCEPTED A DINNER INVITATION AT THE HUXTABLE RESIDENCE, ON 1/31/77.

3. SMALL TALK DURING COCKTAILS AND DINNER RANGED FROM THE BITTER AMERICAN WINTER TO THE UPCOMING "CATFISH" SEASON ON THE MEKONG IN LAOS AND INCLUDED OTHER APOLITICAL SUBJECTS

ON LAOS SUCH AS PAST FLOODS, HARVESTS, TEMPLE FESTIVALS, BOAT RACES AND TRAVEL.

4. VIEWING A WALL PHOTO OF FORMER LAO AND US GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AT A 1974 USIAD/BAN HOU EI SAI MARKET OPENING, BOTH CHERAKHA AND SOUTHAVILAY RECOGNIZED TIAO BOVONE VATTANA, HALF BROTHER OF THE FORMER MONARCH; AND CHAO KHWAING OF HOUA KHONG PROVINCE; HOUMPHENG PHONGSAVANH, FORMER MINISTER OF INTERIOR; AND HOUMPHANG PHATAMAVAN, FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL WELFARE. THESE AND OTHER CIVIL SERVANTS OF THE OLD REGIME ARE "STILL IN THE GOVERNMENT" BUT WITH "DIFFERENT RESPONSIBILITIES" THEY CLAIMED. FORMER WATER AND FORESTRY CHIEF FOR LUANG PREBANG, TIAO KHAMPHANG, HAD, ACCORDING TO CHERAKHA, LEFT THE COUNTRY. HE DID NOT ELABORATE.

5. OTHER MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCES INCLUDED MESSRS PHAO BOUNAPHOL AND PHON SAI, FORMER PATHET LAO OFFICIALS OF THE MIXED COMMITTEE TO IMPLEMENT THE VIENTIANE ACCORDS, AND THAO SUKASEUM, FORMER DIRECTOR OF FORESTRY SERVICE IN BAN HOU EI SAI, STILL HAVE GOVERNMENT POSTS OF "SIGNIFICANT RESPONSIBILITY" THEY EXPRESSED.

6. DESPITE PERCEPTIVE EFFORTS DURING THE CONVERSATION, WHICH WAS IN LAO, TO AVOID ANYTHING POLITICAL, THE SUBJECT OF THAI-LAO RELATIONS (CROSSING BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE MEKONG) FINALLY SURFACED. CHERAKHA, THE MORE ARTICULATE OF THE TWO (FIVE YEARS OF STUDY IN QUEBEC), NERVOUSLY OFFERED THAT THERE ARE STILL PROBLEMS WITH RIVER TRAFFIC BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THAT THE ONLY BORDER POSTS NOW OPEN ALONG THE

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MEKONG ARE AT NONG KHAI AND SAVANNAKHET.

7. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT INTERNAL TRAVEL, SOUTHAVILAY ACCORDED THAT A BUS TRIP TO SAVANNAKHET FROM VIENTIANE NOW COSTS 2000 KIP, THAT RIVER TRANSPORT IS POSSIBLE AND THAT THAI MERCHANTS CAN CROSS TO VIENTIANE FROM SRI CHIANG MAI TO THE "RIVER'S EDGE ONLY" TO SELL THEIR WARES.

8. A POLITE AND CONCERTED EFFORT WAS MADE BY ALL TO MAKE NO COMPARISONS WITH THE PAST AND TO ONLY EVER-SO-OBLIQUELY REFER TO THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS IN LAOS. ON THE SUBJECT OF TRADITIONS, "BOUN THAT LUANG" AND "THE ROCKET FESTIVAL", WHICH, ACCORDING TO RECENT REPORTS IN WESTERN PRESS HAVE BEEN ABOLISHED, ARE STILL OBSERVED, THEY CLAIMED.

9. AFTER AN AMICABLE THREE HOURS, A TOAST TO PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP, AN EXCHANGE OF ADDRESSES (THEIRS IS AROUND

THE CORNER FROM THE AMERICAN EMBASSY AT THAT DAM IN VIENTIANE)
AND AN INVITATION TO RETURN FOR A VISIT "AFTER FIVE YEARS WHEN
EVERYTHING IS ORGANIZED", THEY BID THEIR HOSTS FAREWELL. THEY
RETURN TO VIENTIANE VIA CAIRO AND BANGKOK ON FEBRUARY 5.

10. WHILE EMBASSY UNAWARE THIS CONTACT UNTIL ABOVE MEMCON PREPARED,
HUXTABLE HAS EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS SEE LAOTIANS AGAIN PRIOR THEIR
DEPARTURE IF THERE ANY SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADDITIONAL INFO.
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